1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

563
463 They are especially afraid of the "buda", evil eye concept,
754 of which Falashas are believed especially capable; also of
326 their supposed ability to turn themselves into real and magic hyenas at night.

This magic power, however, is believed to make their
323 tools "strong", and the pottery of the Falasha womenfolk "hard to break", so that their wares are preferred by the Amhara, creating a monopoly for Falasha iron tools and pottery wherever Falasha hamlets are within a day's walking distance. In some areas there are itinerant Falashha smiths, whose womenfolk make pottery at the same time. They will live in a special guest hut at the edge of an Amhara hamlet.

463 Weaving is also done by Falashas, but they have no
563 monopoly on it, as Muslim Ethiopian weavers are believed
286 by the Amhara to turn out togas that are just as good. For many centuries Muslims were permitted to reside only in segregated sections of towns, such as "AddisAlam" of
361 Gondar town. Though this prohibition has been lifted, most Ethiopian Muslims still reside in special quarters of towns, rarely in a rural hamlet on the Amhara plateau. They were not permitted to own land and no one would rent them any.

They see much more of the country trade routes, since it is they who do much of caravan trading, acting as guides, quartermasters and retail traders for Arab coreligionists who are the wholesalers, usually on routes leading to the Sudan, to Eritrea and to Somaliland. The Coptic Amhara consider the Ethiopian Muslims almost as foreign as the Arabs, even the descendants of Amhara who were forcefully

463 563 their erstwhile conquerors.

The majority of the Galla are still primitive, dress in skins, use iron spears since they have few rifles, and are "pagan" or slightly islamized, in provinces south of the Amhara provinces. Their participation in the economy is largely agricultural and pastoral, both honorable occupations in the Amhara view. Their low (though rising) social status is due to their conquest, the African living patterns in their home provinces, the difference in religion and in language, but not to their occupation.

The following crafts fall under the ethnic division of labor:

563 323 [462] A. Pottery-making

This occupation can also be classed under Division of Labor by Sex, since only women, mostly Falasha women, engage in it. In the provinces where no Falasha women are available, pottery is made by Gurage or by Galla women. The only time a Coptic Amhara woman prepares a rough utensil she fashions an unsymmetrical container out of mud coarsely mixed with straw or cowdung and left to dry in the sun without firing. Compared with that, the pottery made by women of the other ethnic groups, is indeed "professional".

323 But in fact even the best pottery made by the craftswomen must be considered primitive. It belongs to the category referred to by archeologists in other areas as "women home industry". The firing is of the "first level", i.e. below 600° Centigrade. No potter's wheel is used. Glazing and waterproofing are minimal and primitive; only

323 the beginning of a slip appears.

There are several puzzles in this situation. In ancient Yemen and Hadhramaut, whence much of Abyssinian culture came, pottery was made with a true slip. The potter's wheel was known from ancient times in many parts of Asia and later in much of North Africa, both areas of ancient contact with and influence on Abyssinia. Yet pottery-making even of the craftswomen in Abyssinia has [462] remained African to this day: it is considered an extension of preparation of food and therefore a strictly female occupation. However, one of the most primitive African methods, e.g. of some Nilotic tribes, who shape pottery from a crude lump of mud, is not used by the craftswomen, though the aforementioned Coptic Amhara housewife may use this method, considered unskilled, and therefore not ignoble.

The first step in pottery-making is the selection of different types of raw material. Three types are usually selected and blended in different proportions for the right consistency and, occasionally, color: Red clay "farafar", often containing iron ochre; sandy, fine clay from soil too poor for farming, "chencha", which is sometimes fired, ground, kneaded with water, dried and broken before use; black soil from fertile topsoil ("lämm") called "walka", often containing graphite. These are kneaded together with gradual additions of water. Next the woman selects a flat round plate of wood or metal to serve as the bottom support, outline and protection from dirt, for the pot about to be made.

823 The method of building up the pot is the spiral-coiling technique (resembling somewhat that of the Choctaw American Indians), strips coiling upward from the botton, as if in imitation of basketry. The woman rolls a thick sausage of the prepared clay between her palms, and presses each tightly, building up the sides of the pot in a spiral. Then she smoothes the sides with a small piece of bamboo, wood, wet corncob, leather rag or sherd of clay. Decorations are by simple incision of lines (if at all), parallel strokes made with a piece of wood or iron spike while the clay is still damp, after burnishing and rubbing has produced a tight and slightly shiny surface. The pottery is then dried in the sun, for 3 days.

The attempt at glazing of some pots, bowls and pitchers to be watertight when used in cooking, sometimes begins even before firing. Such a pot may be burnished with sundried dung, a process called "tärättäfa", which produces a thick and sticky surface, almost like a slip.

Firing is usually done not more than once a week. In preparation, some of the larger and deeper pots, where the sun does not penetrate well enough, may be pre-heated with hot charcoal ("käsäl"), placed inside the jar. Then all pottery is washed, dried again, and leaned neck on neck. After the big beer jars, the next biggest bowls, "daka", (used for fermenting tyeff flour in water) are stacked around them, then the cooking pots "dass"(for "hot" stew) which are smaller, and pitchers and drinking cups, if the space is not needed for the larger water-carrying pots. There are usually no more than 4 of the

323 largest, thigh-high beer jars included in one such heap of pottery to be fired, but a dozen smaller pots may be included. Dry cowdung and branches of hardwood are stuffed in between the pottery and all around. Wind direction and strength is calculated from experience and observation, and when deemed right, the heap is fired. Sometimes the firing lasts only 1 to 2 hours, sometimes longer.

The finished product may be burnished smooth, in case of cooking pots, with the necklace of imported blue glass rings called "doqa". There are several methods of waterproofing pottery ("mamuashat"). The pot may be re-heated on the hearth for 1/2 hour, then placed on the ground and cold milk quickly poured in and swished around for several minutes until the pot is cold. The milk is then thrown away. The silicon that has adhered to the heated cooking pot thus provides a partial, interior glazing. This glazing by animal product is considered better, by the craftswoman, than vegetable glaze. The latter is done by using yeast ("teffin") on a heated pot in place of milk. The large baking plate for enjara, the "megogo", is burnished with the caked remains of crushed nug-seed after the oil has been pressed out, the mass of compressed seed referred to as "yaqebye ar" (lit. excrement of butter). Before actual use, the megogo is further rubbed, this time by the housewife, with leaves of the "ketkete" bush (Dodonea viscosa).

Another method of the craftswomen is to paint on the resinous juice of the euphorbia (Euphorbia candelabrum trem), but this is done only at lower elevations.

323 The result of all of these methods is not a true glaze, rather a dull one of only partial efficiency.

It is interesting that these attempts at glazing are also used on tightly woven reed baskets, "qwacha", waterproofed with "wägämit", skimmed milk, then smoked with "abalo" wood, or the odoroferous "mätänya" wood. This smoking out is also done to pottery, not only cooking pots but also the beer storage jars, "gan", and the waterpot, "madiga", though the wood used is "wanza". But this smoking out is the work of the housewife, not the craftswoman, for the purpose is to kill the sour smell rather than to aid the glazing. Amhara housewives do not glaze any pottery.

When a pot breaks it is no great calamity, for the pieces are ground up and mixed with raw clay in kneading to give the next pot a greater chance. The life of a pot may range from 2 weeks to 5 years, in the opinion of the craftswomen, who admit that no one can predict the life of a pot even in ordinary usage.

Two craftswomen usually work as a team. One, usually the younger, stronger but less experienced kneads the clay in a squatting position, while the older woman squats in the sun building up the pot or stands bent over, burnishing it. A big beer jar, the work of 2 days prior to firing, brings from 50 Ethiopian cents to Eth$1.-, depending on locality. The lesser price is more common in trade between hamlets that have long-established trade connections, while the higher price is common at big markets. The same price applies to 3 to 4 smaller pots.

Pottery is made during the entire dry season, from the months of Teqemt to Senye, interrupted only by the

323 harvest in the first month. Cash income from this occupation in the case of a diligent craftswoman can amount to Eth$50.-per year, which means at least 50 large beer jugs or at least 150 smaller kitchen pottery. Such a craftswoman is called "antäränya" or the general term for craftsman, "kayla" (which, however, is often considered an insult). She may be freed from other labors, particularly spinning, in her own household. But in general she considers it a sideline, for some cash income, or to please the landlord by supplying his household and tenants with pottery at very low prices.

323 443 Most Falasha craftswomen do not like to sell on the big market, despite the much better prices there. The reason they give is that they may face insults during the usual dickering that precedes purchase, and also that they do not wish to arouse the envy of their Coptic Amhara neighbors by accumulating wealth. Another reason is that the big markets take place invariably on Saturday, on which day the Sabbath-observing Falashas cannot go to market or trade, and the Muslim middleman would absorb the extra profit that comes from trading at the market. However, Falasha men do follow the latter alternative with their plowpoints.

323 This disinterest of Falasha craftswomen in developing their economic potentials has led to conservatism in regard to modern change. Though very curious about European pottery brought in the Italian occupation, particularly about shape and glazing, they did not adopt European methods, partly because of technical limitation of power and fuel as well as techniques, partly for the

●323 aforementioned social reasons. They can bake fired bricks, "shehla", but have no use or orders for them, and do not make them at present. They apply their artistic talents [346] to a tower-like crown, "gulelat", which they place on the top of the thatched roof of the Falasha synagogue, the "mesgid" (which has also the practical effect of preventing the penetration of water during the rain storms).

415 The vast majority of clay utensils produced by the craftswoman is used in the household. Many of them are small, not over 12 inches in diameter or height. Round forms predominate, especially spherical or semi-spherical bowls with a long or short neck. Nearly all have two handles on the side, for grasping and for pulling a rope through.

The simple baking plate for the daily enjara bread, the "megogo", in town called "metad", has already been [354] mentioned. Placed on the hearth of three stones, it forms a simple stove, and itself is topped by a somewhat conical ("moged") lid which fits snugly. 20" in diameter, 1-1/2" high, 1" thick, grain is also roasted on it.

There are numerous varieties of water pitchers, mostly pear-shaped, with long, stout necks. When full (about 15 liters), the Amhara women carry them on the back, and therefore a special loop is added by the craftswoman on the base of the neck, so that the rope can be drawn through it and around the chest, for added support. The most common, big water-pitcher of this kind is the "madiga", with a height of 20" of which 5" are spout, 14" at its greatest width, and a 5" width of the spout. It is

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

312 the downward side but is sloped on the up-hill side and therefore triangular in section. The filling-up of the empty space behind the wall, to the new terrace level, may be partly accomplished by hand but tends to be left to nature. During the rains, especially on the steeper slopes, there is a continuous downward movement of soil, which is arrested by the terrace walls and the pockets above them gradually fill up. In the course of centuries an immense amount of simple terracing of this kind has been done, the effect being to accentuate the existing irregularities of the steeper slopes. The landscape has certainly been greatly modified in this way, but it is often impossible to tell at first sight whether a given feature is natural, or partly or wholly due to terracing. It is obvious that such terracing has not only provided additional acreage for agriculture but also served the useful purpose of saving many steep slopes from excessive erosion. In several parts of Ethiopia, including this area, I have seen slopes under cultivation which were so steep that the soil, when loosened and disturbed, would slide away downhill. At first sight one would suppose that such slopes must be completely denuded after a few seasons' rain. The fact that this does not happen is due, I believe, to the vast abundance of stones in these soils, every one of which acts as a minute barrier arresting the flow of water and silt. Nevertheless such slopes, unless terraced, clearly cannot survive indefinitely under cultivation.

443 [487] Surplus produce is brought in to the big weekly market at Debra Berhan which is both the commercial and the social centre of the whole district; all the main routes radiate from it. Every Saturday morning these routes are thronged with market-goers, who can be seen moving along in an almost continuous stream, the well-to-do mounted on mules, the majority on foot, some driving laden donkeys and pack-mules. The products of this countryside are few, and there is little food surplus, but some wheat and barley come to market, also eggs and chickens and a good deal of butter. Some honey (used in making the local mead or *tej*) comes in, and beeswax is collected for export. Firewood, a scarce commodity on the plateau, is carried in in quantity. *Gesho*, the fermenting agent, comes up from the gorges. There is plenty of earthenware, made on the plateau nearby. From the district of Menz to the north come excellent felt blankets and burnouses. Traders from farther afield bring salt from the desert, partly in the bars which used formerly to pass as currency, and raw cotton and spices from the eastern plains. Textiles and other imported goods now find their way to this market by lorry.

When, in the course of the afternoon, the market crowds begin to stream homewards, one may identify the few simple wares they have bought or bartered. Some have a bag or a bar of salt, some raw cotton for spinning or a piece of cotton cloth, some a fresh supply of coffee-beans, some a bottle of kerosene or a cake of soap. Many have acquired earthenware water-pots or [323] cooking vessels; the large round platters (*matad*) 18 inches across, on which [482] the local bread is baked, stand out conspicuously for they are always carried, for safety, on the head.

771 It still remains to describe the most potent of the influences which shape the life of the country-bred Amhara—that of the Church. The priests, of

6: Messing E-5 (1953-1954) 1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

539 and was always looking up intently and with concentration. One of his friends asked him, "What are you looking for?"

"*Mäwča*," replied the wit in his classic manner. [The literal meaning is "exit," i.e., either the exit from the trail on the tiring climb, or "the place where we emerge" from the female body.]

The Wit At Home. Home in his hut in Gondar, AG-H was one day at dusk lying on his bed. [56] His wife had gone to the river to wash her private parts, as is the custom of the Amhara women at nightfall. Tired from the uphill climb from the valley, she rested before the hearth to dry herself, but dozed off. Soon AG-H heard a cannonade of farting, issuing from his half-conscious wife. He called out to her, "Where are you? Come to bed!"

Awakening, she said dazedly, "I am just drying myself."

To which he replied, "You are drying yourself so much that you are cracking apart."

[302] *A Woman's "Way."* [In accordance with ancient custom, women used to pluck out their pubic hair, rubbing ashes between their fingers to get a good grip while plucking.]

One day a girl student of AG-H was late for her lesson. Taking a quick short-cut across the back yard, she tumbled into the ash heap, soiling her lower toga and her legs with the ashes. She excused her appearance to her teacher, saying, "Oh, Master, I was so eager to come quickly, and now I have dirtied myself with ashes all over."

"That is *your way*," nodded AG-H.

Only much later did the girl learn that he had meant not only the wrong way she had come, but was referring to the fact that being smudged with ashes was the natural "way" for a woman.

[564] *The Pot Of Caste.* [The women of the Falasha caste are makers of pottery, a despised occupation among the Coptic Amhara, though much appreciated by the Amhara, who buy all their [323] better pots from them.]

The wife of AG-H, quarreling with a certain woman, accused her of being of Falasha ancestry and that her mother had been a pottery-maker. One day that woman returned from the river valley, carrying a large, full pot of water on her back. She saw AG-H sitting in front of his hut, and decided to take the opportunity to complain to him about the taunts of his wife.

AG-H disliked being involved in the petty quarreling of the womenfolk, but he listened quietly. As she took leave, he patted her full clay pot and said, "*This* is your work."

She thought that he meant she should not quarrel with his wife, should instead attend to her tasks of fetching water, cooking, etc. But on further reflection what had he meant? Had he accused her of being a pottery-maker herself?

Jealousy Is Dangerous. AG-H was also notorious for his prowess in bed and his fickleness in love.

One day his wife had to go far down to a valley to fetch water, since the dry season had left only water holes in the river bed. She left him in charge of their baby. Taking the baby with him, he went to the hut of his current girl friend and spent the afternoon making passionate love. As it happened, this woman also had a baby about the same age. Dusk came rapidly, and AG-H knew that his wife would soon be back. In the hurry, he took the wrong baby.

A moment after his return his wife arrived, laden with water pot and firewood. When she beheld the baby of her current rival, she became very angry and said, "This thing is not my baby! Shall I throw it in the fire?"

Calm as ever, AG-H replied: "There is a fire also in the house of his mother."

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11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*565 776 many kinds: they may be male or female, Christian or Muslim, educated or unschooled, mischievous or somber. *Zār* are depicted as resembling the handsome, light-complexioned Abyssinians. They are not necessarily evil: sometimes a person is inspired by the sound of *zār* singing far off in the woods to add a new song to the local lore. But they are the great carriers of physical and mental illness. Many of the contagious diseases in Abyssinia, like typhus and smallpox, are referred to as "*zār* sicknesses." Above all, the *zār* is the bringer of seizures. When a *zār* lands on somebody's back the victim may go into a trance, succumb to melancholia, or break out in hysteria. Women are most often subjected to fits caused by *zār*—usually by male *zār*, who perform some kind of magical coitus with them and try to compete with their husbands. When a freak is born to a woman, it is often attributed to the malicious effect of a *zār* jealous of her husband.

*565 776 753 [828] [845]

*565 776 [562] Though some kinds of *zār* only desist from molesting their victims through constant propitiations, others can be won over to serve as powerful protecting spirits. Thus an initial discomfort can be turned into a permanent advantage, offering the erstwhile victim magical protection and, as one student has suggested, affording women a temporary escape from their depressed social status through the companionship and opportunities for self-expression found in associations of *zār* "patients."[6]

*565 754 787 Human beings with supernatural powers are of two kinds: those who manipulate the spirits and practice magic, and those who are themselves possessed. The possessed are called *ṭayb* or *budā*. *Ṭayb* (or *ṭabib*) in its original sense means "manual worker," but it has acquired the connotation of "one with the evil eye," the primary meaning of *budā*. By looking at someone the *budā* or *ṭayb* "drinks his blood" through the magic power of his evil eye. The victim will first feel a severe headache and fatigue, then show hysterical frenzy, and finally intestinal cramps. His fingers will be clenched around his thumbs, a sign that the *budā* has grasped the thumbs and does not want anyone to see him taking his "food" from the victim. If the victim is not cured he will eventually waste away and die.

*565 754 [262] [789] The *budā* is helpless to check his malevolent power, and if he enters the home of a friend who is not a *budā* he will shout ahead to get the children out of the way for fear he might unwittingly infect them. People who eat pork are thought invulnerable against the evil eye, the pork in their systems serving as a kind of antibody against the infection. Potters and metalsmiths have been kept in a low caste position in Abyssinia partly because of the belief that such artisans inherit this evil power along with their craft from their parents. It is important in selecting a spouse for one's child to make sure that there is no *budā* blood in the family, and to be called a *budā* or *ṭayb* is one of the more serious insults.

[323] [326] [554]

The Amhara peasant has many beliefs about the malevolent beings in his